

Disability Mentoring Day Provides Career-Building Experiences for Delaware Students

NEW CASTLE (Oct. 14, 2019) – Nearly two dozen students with disabilities, including clients of the Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Division for the Visually Impaired, will participate in career-building experiences during the University of Delaware's Disability Mentoring Day on Wednesday, Oct. 16, at various locations in New Castle County.

The day will begin at the Courtyard Marriott-University of Delaware in Newark as 15 students from UD's Career & Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program and six from the Spectrum Scholars program will gather for a welcome breakfast and morning speaker. The students will hear from Anthony Pacilio, Vice President at JPMorgan Chase and Program Manager for JPMorgan's Autism at Work program. JPMorgan Chase launched Autism at Work in July 2015 as a four-person pilot program to employ people on the autism spectrum. Since then, it's grown to more than 150 employees in eight countries.

In September 2018, JPMorgan Chase partnered with UD and provided a 10-year grant to start the Spectrum Scholars program, which is administered by UD's Center for Disabilities Studies. This is the first year the Spectrum Scholars students are participating in Disability Mentoring Day.

"The opportunity that Disability Mentoring Day provides these students to experience possible career paths and explore beyond a classroom is incredibly valuable," said Governor John Carney. "As the students consider what is next for them, it's

important they have the chance to discover for themselves what their calling is, and just as importantly, what it isn't, as they look to their future."

Following the morning session, participants will take part in job shadowing experiences with employers in New Castle County before returning to the hotel for lunch and reflections on their experiences.

"Disability Mentoring Day gives our students a great opportunity to work with employers to learn the day-to-day responsibilities of particular positions and what education and experiences will help them prepare for a career in their chosen fields," said James Sellers, Program Manager, Career and Life Studies Certificate program at the UD Center for Disabilities Studies.

Work sites that will provide job shadowing for the CLSC students are VCA Newark Animal Hospital, Early Learning Center at UD, Winterthur Museum and Library, Delaware Museum of Natural History, The College School, Short Order Productions Teakettica Graphic Design, Passport Health, Embassy Suites, You've Been Framed and DelDOT Canal District Terminal. The Spectrum Scholars students will be shadowing at UD Prosthetics Laboratory, Predictive Analytics Group and JPMorgan Chase.

"The benefits to the students, the businesses and mentors taking part in Disability Mentoring Day are countless," said Dr. Kara Odom Walker, Cabinet Secretary for Delaware's Department of Health and Social Services. "Not only do the students get a feel for the employment options available to them when they are ready, the employers get a chance to see the potential benefits of having a diverse workforce."

Disability Mentoring Day is a national program usually held in October during National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies started the first Disability Mentoring Day in Delaware 10

years ago. Today, a collaboration of agencies have joined the center, including the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the Department of Labor's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Education, the New Castle County Transition Committee, DisabilityIN: Delaware and Easterseals of Delaware & Maryland Eastern Shore, in planning events.

The group is co-chaired by two young people with disabilities – Alyssa Cowin, an operations support specialist with DHSS, and Julia Hensley, who is working through Easterseals at Victory Fellowship Church.

In a change from recent years, the Disability Mentoring Day event for a group of Delaware high schools will be held in November instead of October to allow more time after the start of the school year for planning the event. Several New Castle County school districts will host their third annual Career Development Day on Nov. 20 at the Siegel Jewish Community Center in Talleyville.

About 70 students from Appoquinimink, Brandywine, Christina, Colonial, Red Clay and New Castle County Vo-Tech school districts, as well as the Delaware School for the Deaf and Independent Resources, Inc., usually participate in the Career Development Day. Past sessions have included how to be a self-advocate under the Americans with Disabilities Act, work readiness, Q&A sessions with people from various careers and social media matters.